

# Archetypes in Literature

EECE 441  
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## **Definition of Archetype:**

“A universally recognizable element . . . that recurs across all literature and life (Latrobe 13). Psychologist Carl Jung called these elements a kind of “collective unconscious” of the human race, prototypes rather than something gained from experience. The word is derived from the Greek: *arche*, original, and *typos*, form or model; thus, original model (Latrobe 13).

An archetype is the first real example or prototype of something (as the Model T is the prototype of the modern automobile). In this sense an archetype can be considered the ideal model, the supreme type or the perfect image of something (Brunel 111-112, 114).

A key to understanding folk literature is to understand archetypes. “An archetype is to the psyche what an instinct is to the body. . . . Archetypes are the psychic instincts of the human species.” (Edinger as quoted in Knapp 10). Archetypes are universal in human beings. Archetypes result in a deep emotional response for readers.

“Archetypes are repeated patterns that recur in the literature of every age” (Sloan 48).

## **Examples of Archetypes**

### **Characters:**

#### **Hero (think of the classic hero journey & qualities of hero)**

- “The main character leaves his or her community to go on an adventure, performing deeds that bring honor to the community” (Herz and Gallo 121).

#### **Mother figure**

- **Fairy Godmother (surrogate mother)**—comforts and directs child, especially when he or she is confused and needs guidance. Represents powers that can be called on for help when it is needed. Helps young person to solve own problems (Knapp 71).
- **Earth Mother**
- **Stepmother**

#### **The great teacher/mentor**

- Wise old men/women—protects or helps main character when he or she faces challenges.

#### **The innocent**

- Child/Youth
- Inexperienced adult

#### **Underdog**

#### **Double**

- Split personality—the other side of an individual

## **Helping animals**

### **The Sacrificial Redeemer**

- “The protagonist is willing to die for his or her beliefs; the main character maintains a strong sense of morality” (Herz and Gallo 123).

### **Scapegoat/Sacrificial Victim**

### **Enchantress/Temptress**

### **The Giant/Monster/Ogre**

### **Villain**

- Wolf

### **Trickster**

### **Evil figure**

- The Devil
- Serpent

## **Settings**

### **Garden**

- Cultivated and carefully planned. Restricted to certain vegetation.

### **Forest**

- Habitat of the Great Mother (Mother Nature), the lunar force. Fertility. The vegetation and animals flourish in this “green world” because of the sustaining power of the Great Mother. Symbolically the primitive levels of the feminine psyche, protective and sheltering. Those who enter often lose their direction or rational outlook and thus tap into their collective unconscious. This unregulated space is opposite of the cultivated gardens, which are carefully planned and are restricted to certain vegetation.

### **Tree**

- Represents life and knowledge

### **Caves and tunnels**

- Deep down where character delves into self
- Place that character goes when “invisible” or inactive
- At the extreme may signify death

**Mountains and peaks**

- Highest peak is place to “see” far
- Place to gain great insight

**The River**

- Crossing river may symbolize new territory
- Rivers can be boundaries or borders & on the other side is something new or different
- May represent human life or time passing as we follow the river from its source to its mouth

**The Sea**

- Vast, alien, dangerous, chaos
- Waves may symbolize measures of time and represent eternity or infinity

**Fountain**

- Stands for purification; the sprinkling of water (baptism) washes away sin. Water of fountain gives new life (Knapp 32).

**Islands**

- Microcosms or small worlds unto themselves
- Represent isolation or get-a-ways

**Actions/Events:**

**Journey**--“The protagonist takes a journey, usually physical but sometimes emotional, during which he or she learns something about himself or herself or finds meaning in his or her life as well as acceptance in a community” (Herz and Gallo 112).

- Linear
- Circular
- Quests
  - Quest for material wealth
  - Quest for security, as a secure place to live
  - Quest for kin
  - Quest for global good, such as when a kingdom is threatened
  - Quest for self, for self-identity or self-assurance

**Rites of initiation****Parental Conflict and Relationships**

- “The protagonist deals with parental conflict by rejecting or bonding with parents” (Herz and Gallo 117).

**Coming of age**

## **Sleep**

- Crucial for physical and/or psychological healing. During dreams, person can grow. Person can fantasize freely in sleep. A transitional and beneficial period. In dream sphere can descend to the sphere of the Great Mother. Person awakens with a greater understanding of human nature (Knapp 88).

## **Sacrificial rites**

### **The Test or Trial**

- “In the **transition** from one stage of life to another, the main character experiences a rite of passage through growth and change; he or she experiences a **transformation**” (Herz and Gallo 115).

### **Birth/Death and Rebirth**

- “Through pain and suffering the character overcomes feelings of despair, and through a process of self-realization is reborn” (Herz and Gallo 110).

### **The Fall: Expulsion from Eden**

- “The main character is expelled because of an unacceptable action on his or her part” (Herz and Gallo 111).

### **Annihilation/Absurdity/Total Oblivion**

- “In order to exist in an intolerable world, the main character accepts that life is absurd, ridiculous, and ironic” (Herz and Gallo 116).

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